
REMARKS - DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION-

LAUNCH OF THE ECONOMIC AND HEALTH DIALOGUE OF THE AMERICAS (EHA) ON THE OCCASION OF THE IX SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

JUNE 7, 2022 - 3:00 PM-4:15PM

- Under Secretary Jose Fernandez, Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, United States Department of State
- Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro
- Senior Officials present (to be completed with information from USG)
- Distinguished panelists, colleagues.

A very good afternoon to you!

I am truly pleased to be with you here in this beautiful city of Los Angeles, and in particular, to join you this afternoon in this the launch of the Economic and Health Dialogue of the Americas!

Let me especially thank the Government of the United States for convening this important meeting, and indeed for hosting the IX Summit of the Americas, on the theme of building a more Resilient, Equitable and Sustainable future for this Region.

And let me say that after two and a half years of the most devastating pandemic we have experienced in over a century, it is good to be physically here with you

today, and to be able to share a table with so many Member States and friends of the Inter-American Health System, and its' specialized agency in public health - the Pan American Health Organization.

The Americas has been at the epicenter of this pandemic. To date, more than 2.7 million lives have been lost as a direct result of COVID-19, with 157 million confirmed cases in the Americas.

No community went untouched within our Region. Our health, social and economic systems were stretched to the limit.

Health systems were underfunded and ill prepared for the constant surge of cases, wave after wave. And even with the massive injection of resources during the pandemic, they could not overcome long standing systemic deficiencies, the result of ill-conceived health sector reforms, and the lack of political attention to health over decades.

As COVID wreaked economic havoc throughout the Americas, inequities that have long impacted our Region only deepened.

More than 34 million people lost employment in Latin America and the Caribbean during the first year of the pandemic, this in a region characterized by high levels of labor informality. Some recovery is now progressing, but it has been unequal, and many have fallen through the safety net.

The important advances that this Region had made in poverty alleviation over the last 14 years have been severely setback, with over 4.7 million people falling into poverty, and a generation of young people now behind years on their education.

The inextricable linkages between health and the economy during times of pandemic, and for sustainable and inclusive development, have been made all too clear to us.

And yet, the pandemic also demonstrated what can be done, when health and economic sectors work collectively!

When the virus arrived, governments and international agencies moved quickly by mobilizing emergency funding and reallocating existing resources. In total, more than US\$135 billion of external financing was mobilized across the region for the pandemic response, social protection and macroeconomic stability, this to complement domestic financing for the pandemic response.

Countries in the Americas undertook the most rapid expansion of social protection programs we have witnessed, to mitigate increased levels of impoverishment, and protect vulnerable populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19: women, the elderly, afro-descendant and indigenous populations.

This stimulus helped power the largest surge capacity in health service delivery, as well as the farthest-reaching immunization effort in the world. Since COVID-19 vaccines were first introduced in March 2021, PAHO distributed more than 270 tons of PPEs to our countries, and more than [1.8 billion doses](#) of vaccines across the Americas, reaching over 65% of the eligible population of Latin America and the Caribbean. We engaged with more than 1.8 million health workers on the PAHO Virtua Campus, a health education platform for the Americas that we used to train more than 900,000 primary care workers and emergency teams to ensure their protection utilizing PPEs, and in the case management of COVID19 patients, saving lives.

The Region took a transformative leap in terms of its scientific and technological capacity, with the rapid deployment of digital technology, and in the development and production of vaccines and other critical health technologies to tackle the pandemic. Here we had no choice, as supply chains collapsed, and the dependency of Latin America and the Caribbean on a small number of highly concentrated pharmaceutical markets from outside the Region, became all too evident.

Never before has the case for investing in health and the health economy been made so clearly, and the consequences of under-investment been rendered so starkly.

Now however, the slow economic recovery throughout the Region is impacting fiscal capacity and resource availability to sustain action, threatening the ability of health systems to continue to address COVID19, to deliver essential health services and address future health needs.

Colleagues, this pandemic is not over. Cases are once again rising in North America, while we continue to observe a significant relative increase in cases, week on week, in South America.

We will need to sustain our efforts and the investment in the development of more resilient health systems equipped to respond to this and future new threats when they arise. This is why it's critical for us to increase spending in health well beyond the current levels of 3.7% of GDP, to achieve the PAHO recommended target of 6% of GDP, domestic public resources, and not just in the years when crisis hits. We must continue to invest in the transformation of health systems based on primary health care, building capacities in the essential public health functions and pandemic preparedness and response.

The interdependency between health and the economy requires us to coordinate more closely on cross-cutting issues that impact both sectors including resource allocation and regulation, fiscal space for health and pandemic preparedness, financial and social protection. The impact of these investments can be amplified with strong leadership, from across the health and economy sectors, and from all our Regional leaders.

Protecting the health of all peoples and striving for fairness and justice is a common objective we all share, and it is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security in this Region.

For this reason, PAHO thanks the United States for convening this forum, and for initiating this important deliberation on a future Americas where we have stronger more resilient health systems that address the needs of all.

We look forward to working with all countries in the Region on the development of the Economic and Health Dialogue of the Americas.

Investing in health should be among our easier choices.

It is central to everything the countries of our region covet for their future:

- health security and resilience,
- economic prosperity,
- universal health and
- limitless opportunity for all citizens.

Thank you.